

Narrator: Thelma and Harris Gordon

Interviewer: Isabel Ingram

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Place: Gordon home, Homer

I. When did you first move to Homer?

H. We first moved here in 1936, however I'd been to Homer in 1925, but, we, as a family, came here in 1936.

I. What was it like in 1925, when you came here?

H. Oh, there was probably only half a dozen families here. No roads, no modern conveniences, it was just a homesteading area. Principally, the people had some stock, and raised gardens, ~~and that~~, and in the Summer, why, they went fishing or worked in the canneries.

I. Is that why you came to Homer, is to homestead?

H. Not originally, but, I was just passing through Homer in 1925. I came in from Seldovia, and I got off at the end of the Spit and walked up to Kasilof, on the beach. And I worked there on a Fox ranch until the Spring and then I worked on a cannery tender during the summer, ^{worked} during the Herring industry. And I went back outside in September, went back to school. And didn't come back to Alaska until 1936, I had acquired a family in the mean time, so, we came ⁹¹¹ to Alaska, we settled here in Homer, that was 1936 and we've been here ever since.

I. Are you glad you moved to Homer?

H. Definitely.

I. When did you, ~~did you~~ homestead?

H. No. We bought a homestead.

I. You bought a homestead?

H. And, we went into the foxranching business, and we went in partnership with Samuel L. Pratt, who's my wifes brother.

I. I see. Foxfarming was a big business then, in Homer?

H. (Nod)

I. When the depression hit, did it hurt..?

H. Well, ~~of course, the depression was~~, we were going through the depression when we came here. In fact, there'd been depression ^{20 years} here sometime before that, and the people here weren't really hurt like they were outside with the bread lines, in fact, on the beach from Homer to Anchor Point had probably a ~~couple~~ ^{couple} dozen men that were mining the flour gold off the beach ^{and} so they were able to make a living in sorts there by just the mining and really, nobody went hungry here because there was ^{meat} meat to get and fish and the Homer gardens were good.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (2)

I. Did you sell the produce from your gardens, or did you usually use it for your own use?

H. Yeah, we sold potatoes and stuff like that.

I. Who did you sell to?

H. Well,

T. To the people in Kodiak and

H. Well, during the war, why, we sold to the military forces.

I. In Kodiak?

H. Well, they came over here after it.

I. So that was your main income?

H. ^{Yes} Our, after we sold the foxes, why, I went to work for the, what was then the Alaska Road Commission, and spent the summers working with them; and in the winter time, why, it was, well we had 2 horses and we had some cows and other farm animals and we made our living that way, it wasn't very, we weren't prosperous, but we never went hungry.

I. Did you find, did you have to experiment alot, like, with what would grow in the garden?

H. Yes.

I. I see you have a nice garden down there.

H. Yep. Potatoes especially grow well here, I've had good luck with the potatoes.

I. You lived off the land alot.

H. Very much.

I. Uh huh. Did you do alot of fishing?

H. I spent five years commercial fishing in the '40's, and 2 years made very good at it, and the other 3 years were marginal, so I eventually got out of that.

I. And then what did you go into? just...?

H. Well, I continued to work for the Highway Department and, at times that I wasn't fishing, so, I still made enough to get by, although we had a family of four children and by that time ^{they} we began to have to go off to school and so, of course, we took them forth.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (3)

H. so we took them, and I kept working, fishing and on the road, and then after I'd decided not to fish any more, ~~why~~ I got on steady with the Highway Department in which I worked year round, which added to our financial condition satisfactorily.

I. Yeah.

H. I was able to save enough money so that when I had the opportunity to buy the Heady Hotel, ~~why~~, we bought the Heady Hotel in 1958 and owned and operated it for 15 years. But, I also continued to work for the Highway Department and finally I resigned in 1970, and was credited with 30 years ~~of~~ with the Highway Department.

I. Did you help build the highway from here to Anchorage?

H. Uh huh, this section of it.

I. Uh ~~huh~~. Going back to schools, what kind of schools were here when you came?

H. Well, there was a one room school when our children started school, and in the Homer area there was only 9 children going to school when ours started.

I. Were there more than one school?

H. Yes, there was another school over at Miller's Landing.

I. ~~Did you~~, Was there many communications between Miller's Landing and Homer?

H. Yes, there was a, when we first came here, there was a dirt, in 1936, there was a dirt road between the main, what is now the main part of Homer, and Miller's Landing, where the other school was, and so people were able to go back and forth. But, when we came to Homer in '36, we bought the 4th car here, but there was no gravel roads, they didn't start graveling the roads until 1937, so it was ~~a~~, at first it was just fair weather, and the roads weren't kept open in the winter time, during those early years.

I. So, like, how about telephones or,...

H. We had a, just a community built telephone system, everybody pitched in and put up the poles, and strung the wires. We had the old-fashioned type crank telephones.

I. Then ^{there} ~~there~~ was alot of community, was ^{there} ~~there~~ alot of community actions?

H. Yea, there was dances and socials and things like that. So, the people, everybody here was acquainted with each other, we, everybody knew everybody else, and it isn't like it is now when you hardly know anybody.

I. Right. Which way do you like Homer, how it was then or like it is now?

H. Well, it was pretty primitive when we came here and we didn't have any electricity, and had to go to the out house and ^{no indoor plumbing and} all. ~~It was~~, I liked certain aspects of it but, I wouldn't want to go back to it. I like to see progress.

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (4)

I. How do you feel about the growth in the population and everything in Homer?

H. Well, for a good many years, Homer didn't grow perceptibly, but, in the last few years, it has grown fabulously. I predicted that many years ago, but it didn't come to pass until the last few years when people could recognize the potential of Homer, and aware of the beauties and the fishing and all the, and the favorable climate. So, Homer still has a very good future.

I. ^{Here we} What was your first impression of Homer, when you first saw it?

H. I first saw it in 1924 from across the bay, ^{well,} you know, from the reports from the few homesteaders that came over to Seldovia, where I was, they thought it was a land of milk and honey, and described it as a favorable place to live, so, my first thoughts about Homer were, well, it must be a nice place to live. So, when I did come through here was in the winter time and it didn't look very favorable then. But, the reason we came here to live is because my brother-in-law, Sam Pratt, had recommended that we come here because there was schools for the children, and a place to raise fox. So, we went into the fox ranching business together. And, after three years, ^{because they} the fox ranching business became something that I was trying to get out of, so, we separated as partners.

I. And you went into fishing?

H. Well, before the fishing I went into working on the highway.

I. Were there alot of, you know, people that, there weren't too many people then.

H. There was very few people when I first came here, and like I say, during the depression there was, people came in here, ^{because they} like I said, could raise a garden get moose meat, and fish and, then they started moving on the upper bench, and there was quite a few people that lived up on top, in fact, there was cabins way back from Homer, and they even built a school up on, across from the ridge. But, after things ~~are~~ started opening up, when they started getting airports and getting ready for the time called war, or WWII, why, ^{there was} ~~of course,~~ construction works and in that region and various other places, so those people that I knew on the upper bench they left, ^{many} so many of those cabins were left vacant, still lying down ^{because they} within the last few years, other people, retired people ^{came} moved permanent in the area and have built nice homes up on the upper bench, so the scene is changing.

I. When was the first airplane?, do you think, or, do you remember?

H. Well, it was probably about '40, 1940. It landed on the, what was a, where Beluga lake is now, the flat area therebut, incidentally, Beluga lake was formed by damming it, putting a ^{dam} ~~crow~~way there across the Slough' and it ^{built} ~~builds~~ up with water on the upper side, but before that ^{there} it was just a marshy flat out there, and that's where the bush planes landed. Then in 1941, why the present air field was started, construction was finished in '42.

I. How did you get your mail before the...?

Mrs and Mrs. Grodon interview. (5)

H. It came by steamer up over to Seldovia and up ^{then} from Seldovia to Homer by a small gas boat. The Post Office was here when we first came was just a small log cabin on the beach, the beach where the Inlet Trading Post is.

Bishop's beach, I think they call it.

I. Yeah,

T. Right now it's the wild berry, that little log cabin ...

I. Uh huh, Oh that's ...

T. That's the former Post Office.

I. Oh neat!! How about ^{the} your dairy products, for food?

H. Well, we like I say, had to milk cows and we made butter, and we sold a little milk and some butter, but there wasn't enough people there to really make it worth while so we threw lots of milk down the creek.

I. How about stores? ~~When~~ was the first store that came in?

H. Well, the old Walli store was first real ~~bona~~ ^{bona} fide store, and it started in '37.

T. It started in 1937.

H. 1937.

I. And, Mrs. Walli owned it?

H. Yes, Mrs. Walli and her husband, he died shortly after.

I. And that, that's where Proctor's is now, right?

H. Yes.

I. Uh huh.

H. But not in that, the Proctor's store is ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ a new part of it, the original store was that high building used for a ~~store~~ ^{store} house.

I. And the main part of town was more forward?

H. ⁵ Well, after Walli's store started, why that became the main part of town.

Where as, before that, I don't know really any main part of town, just scattered, there was no businesses at all there ~~was~~ ^{was} just homes, and homesteads. And people ~~would~~ got their groceries from Seldovia, by gas boat and it would land the groceries on the beach, and if you weren't down there to pick them up, why the tide might get them.

I. Were there any docks on the end of the spit?

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (6)

H. Not when we came.

I. Not when you came?

H. The turn of the century, when the coal company was here they had a dock, but it was, had been destroyed by the ice when we came here in '36 there wasn't any dock built until several years after. It was built by the settlers here, eh--I all doing the labor and it eventually went out by the ice crushing against it, and another one was built about '52, it was a hassle to finance it so the Territory stepped in and built it.

I. So, when was Homer legally a city or community?

H. I forgot, I don't remember when it became a city, it was probably about 1960 or '65, I don't remember.

T. Was it a city when we first bought the hotel?

H. No.

I. Do you think hotels brought in a lot of the tourists that come in?

H. Land's End has certainly attracted the tourists, the hotel we had was mostly business men, government workers, and construction crews and people like that, we did get some tourists but we had them before Homer really got recognized as a tourist attraction.

I. O.k. well, thank you very much.

H. Well, aren't you going to let her say anything?

I. She can say anything.

H. She usually does the talking, I don't know why you picked on me.

I. I don't know.

H. He usually gives a, you know, a fair weather tale.

H. She probably wouldn't give you a close of a picture of Homer as I would; would but, she was here for about 10 years before she began to even have any interest in Homer.

T. Even Begun to like it.

I. Oh really, you didn't like it when you came?

H.--Den

T. We didn't.

H. Don't put that on the air.

Mrs and Mrs. Gordon interview. (7)

I. Well, what was there for you to do, I mean, what ~~was-there~~ did you do around the homestead.

T. Work!

I. work!!

T. I stacked Hay, but I left my little kids down in the cabin by themselves while I was up in the hay fields which didn't appeal to me at all. But, some ~~one~~ had to do it and he would be working ~~all~~ during the day so I'd have to get the team down and have them in the barn ready for them to go out and mow more hay. Sometimes we'd be doing dishes at 11:00 at night and then have to get up at 5:00 in the morning. *one*

I. So you guys hayed, had hayfields?

T. Yes, all the area here was one enormous hay field now it's grown into brush and puske's and alders and weeds and everything it used to be a beautiful wild hay land.

I. Do you know what that house down there was?

H. It's a fella building a house, a home and it's been worked on since last winter. MY

I. Yeah,

H. You always tell them about the 39 bails of water you carried in one day.

T. That's one reason why I didn't like it.

I. Oh, what's this.

T. It was pioneering, you had to pack your water and if the washing machine, if the motor broke down then you had-to-use washed on the board for a family of 6 and.

I. Oh, ~~god~~., So you enjoy the modern conveniences?

T. We left southern california where we had....

H. As long as you're weeping, why ~~don't~~ you tell there was one time we didn't get any mail for 6 weeks. *you might as well tell her*

T. Our first Christmas, came in February. With three little youngsters all, you know, eager for Christmas. Nothing, not even anything in the store that you could buy.

I. So the mail was late often, or not?

H. It was, generally a boat came from Seldovia about every 2 weeks but occasionally there was a disrupture like strikes and various things and so you couldn't always tell exactly what. there was atleast 2 weeks between mail.

Mr. and Mrs. Brew Gordon interview. (8)

T. If a letter came in, that you were to answer, it would be a month before they got their answer, it was 2 weeks coming up from the States, to get over here, and then if you mailed an answer back, it would take it 2 weeks to get back out, providing you got your letter on that first boat that was going back to Seldovia.

I. So you had to get your timing all right?

H. It was 6 years that I spent right here in Homer, other than Seldovia, never got away.

T. He had a cousin living in Kasilof and it was 13 years before we saw any of him.

I. So the transportation like, on the mainland, over here away from Seldovia there was none *before the roads.*

H. Before the roads, no. And we couldn't get up the inlet except by walking the beaches, and a lot of times, the inlet was frozen over, we couldn't go up by boat and of course there was no airplanes when we first came here, so the only way to get up there, up the inlet was by walking.

I. Did the bay usually froze over?

H. Not...

H. Not Kachemak bay, Cook inlet.

I. Cook Inlet.

H. From Ninilchik on up.

I. Oh, I see. *That's interesting.* You But, you did a lot of walking, like walking to town or something?

H. Yes we did. The kids had to walk to school. We lived in a cabin right, do you know where the ~~Richard~~ Joanne Edens and?

I. Uh huh.

H. Well, they're using the cabin as a tackle shop and that's the cabin we lived in and, of course, the kids had to walk to school.

I. And where was the school located.

H. Down where the present High school is.

I. Oh, I see.

H. The middle school.

I. The Middle School.

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HERE*

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (9)

H. And it was, I don't know, I don't remember how many years it was it was probably, let's see, probably 10 years that they had to walk to school.

T. It was more than that.

H. Almost 10 years, I think, until ~~we sent them off~~ ^{that they had to walk} to school.

T. But, there was just 2 girls in High School.

H. Before we started having a school bus.

I. Yeah, that's.....

T. I mean, that meant that the little ones, you know, when they first started school, they had a two mile hike down to school in the morning, and a two mile hike when home.

H. In the winter it was, ~~dark when they went to school,~~ ^{they went to school in the dark} and dark when they and came home in the dark.

I. And came home in the dark, yeah. That's always depressing. Did you put orders in, like over, like, to Seldovia for your groceries?

H. Well, at first, but later ^{why} we made up big orders and sent out to Seattle,

T. Through the store.

H. Through the store and got a year's supply and brought it home.

I. Oh, so you stocked up?

H. Yes.

I. How did you refrigerate your food?

H. We canned most food, - needed to be kept over, and of course, we wouldn't get our moose until fall and when it got colder we just hung it, the meat, up.

T. And then it would turn ^{warm} down and ~~it would~~ start to rain and we'd have to quik, grab it and down and can it all at once.

I. Oh.

H. But, there was no refrigeration before we got electricity.

I. And when did electricity come?

H. About 1950.

T. '51 was the first time we turned it on in our home. He put up the light fixtures while I was working in Seldovia in the cannery and ~~we~~ ^{we} came home, the girls and I had been working there and our son had been on a boat, and we came in and I turned on the lights

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (10)

T. and ~~turned on the lights~~ and turned them off because we were going outside to the States.

I. Oh.

T. Between us, we made enough ^{money} that year, and by selling a house that we had built,

I. Uh huh,

T. And we went outside. That was the year the two girls, our two girls, see, the oldest are twins so that was the year they started college.

I. --Oh,--I see

H. n Yes the first,,,

I. Oh, I see, so you took them to college?

H. We took them out.

I. Well, that was nice.

HT And then my son went into High School down in California, too. They went to college in Seattle, Seattle Pacific and then our son went down to California stayed with his Grandparents and went to High School. And the youngest ^{came} back with us because she felt sorry for us being all alone.

I. Well, how do you think the School system was here, did you like it all- at all, or...?

HT. The school system was allright, it was the Schoolhouse. The youngsters would go to school and by the time they ~~get to school~~ get there, their would be so cold, the teacher would think they were frozen.

H. They'd have to huddle around the stove to keep warm, especially cold days.

T. More than once the teacher called up and said, "What shall I do, I think Joyce's feet are frozen?" .

I. Oh, no. Yeah, that's too bad.

T. And of course, the floor in the school was terrible and it was so drafty, it was, the floors were terribly cold, the floor, it was one room.

I. Yeah.

T. But the children, the children learned more, I think, in the school, as far as the three R's is concerned, then they do now.

I. Yeah, probably so.

HT. Because the teacher had fewer pupils, and, well they were, the teachers

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (11)

T. were different then.

H. The teachers had 9 kids ~~our~~ when ours first started, now our daughter-in-law has 80 in the kindergarten.

I. Was.

T. She had 67 last year.

H. I thought she said 80.

T. Well, they were that many registered, some of them dropped out and others came in so,,

I. right.

H.T. they were, well, balanced.

I. Uh huh.

T. And that's too much for any one teacher, you can't give them ~~any~~ individual help, or any time at all.

I. That's right.

T. When the school~~x~~ was smaller, while she had all 8 grades, she didn't have as many students so she had more time to devote to them.

I. Right. Did you, guys have a, this sounds funny, I mean did you run into any major problems on the homestead?

H. No, our major problem was the fact that there was no doctor or nurse^{some} here so we had various difficulties ^{with} times when we had to get the kids over to Seldovia for Medical attention, that was our major problem.

I. It wasn't health, instead it was getting Medical attention, was there alot of those, I mean, did you have alot of...?

H. No, being not around ~~many~~ people, why, you don't catch as many contagious diseases.

T. They managed to have them all, though.

I. Oh.

T. But he was fishing, see, he'd be gone for 3 months in the summer time,

I. uh huh.

T. He wouldn't be home at all, so but, any disasters, I had to deal with.

H,I. Oh, so you guys would go over to Seldovia for medical attention?

T. Yes, ~~they~~ they had a hospital over there, ⁱⁿ when was the hospital built, do you remember?

Mr. and Mrs. Gordon interview. (18).

H. I don't know.

T. It was there when the kids and I worked in the cannery in '51. (doorbell)
Oh, I'll get the door.

I. Yeah, the boats and everything went over to Weldovia, Seldovia
was the main...?

H. That's where the steamers from Seattle came, they had an ocean
dock there, there was no, when we first came here there was no dock
here at all and later, of course the dock was built here in Homer, *and boats*
and steamers would come in to Homer, but that was several years
after we came.

I. And how did you get to Homer, by boat or....?

H. How did we get from Seldovia over to here?

Uh-I. Uh huh.

H. By gas boat, small boat.

I. Did you do fishing local, or did you go out?

H. No, I, the boat that I fished on went, we went into the Kodiak, *a power* and *the*
Port Dick area.

I. Uh huh, right.' Well,...

~~Q. -- That's our grandchildren, do you know the Farnans?~~